



FACT SHEET:

Hospitals For a Healthy Environment (H2E):

Voluntary Partnership with the American Hospital Association to Reduce Hospital Waste

Mission

Work in voluntary partnership with the American Hospital Association and its member hospitals to:

- Virtually eliminate mercury waste generated by hospitals by 2005;
- Reduce overall hospital waste volume by 33 percent by 2005, and 50 percent by 2010; and
- Jointly identify additional substances to target for pollution prevention and waste reduction opportunities

Background

Medical waste incinerators are the fourth largest known releasers of mercury to the environment, constituting approximately 10 percent of all emissions sources, and hospitals are responsible for producing one percent of the total municipal solid waste in the entire country.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in an effort to protect the American people and the environment, has been working in recent years to reduce mercury releases into the environment. For example, EPA recently wrote new air regulations targeting mercury reduction from medical waste incinerators, and have been working to stem mercury releases through the 1997 Canada-U.S. Binational Toxics Strategy.

The American Hospital Association (AHA) is a national organization that represents and serves nearly 5,000 hospitals, health care networks, and their patients and communities. On June 24, 1998, the AHA and the EPA, in consultation with Healthcare Without Harm, a group representing 80 NGOs, reached this landmark agreement.

Primary goals

- AHA institutional and professional members as well as other health care professionals technical information, education and practical strategies relating to pollution prevention opportunities that exist with respect to waste generated by the health care industry.
- An H2E Manual, which describes various processes of elimination and reduction of mercury in hospitals as well as citing the dangers of PBTs (persistent, bio-accumulative and toxic pollutants) and the necessity to reduce the volumes of waste generated.
- Dissemination of the H2E Manual and other materials through teleconferences, workshops, electronic and print media. The H2E effort is built upon the collaborative working relationship of this network of partners and their commitment to the goals of mercury, toxic chemical, and waste reduction in hospitals.

Non-governmental Partners

- Health Care Without Harm, local government agencies (Minnesota Technical Assistance Program); state and metropolitan health care associations (Colorado Health and Hospital Association); health care environmental services directors (American Society for Healthcare Environmental Services), health care material managers (Association for Healthcare Resource and Materials Management), physicians (American Medical Association), nurses (American Nurses Association) and, waste management industry representatives (Environmental Industries Association), and product manufacturers (Healthcare Industry Manufacturers Association).

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

- Established an Environmental Leadership Council (ELC), composed of stakeholders from the healthcare industry, members of the medical community, non-profit advocacy organizations, medical equipment suppliers, waste handlers, and local, state, and federal governments, to provide overall leadership in the implementation of the MOU.
- Formed 12 multi-stakeholder workgroups to help meet the goals set out in the agreement. The workgroups include: awards and recognition, communications, baseline data collection, best practices, chemical waste minimization, clearinghouse for environmentally-preferable purchasing, environmental accounting, ethylene oxide minimization, mercury virtual elimination, resource directory, and, total waste volume reduction.
- Developed a H2E Manual for distribution to hospitals through both the electronic and print media. The manual includes chapters on: Best Practices Management Tools, a Chemical Minimization Plan, and a "How to" guide on environmentally-preferable purchasing.
- A draft Mercury Virtual Elimination plan is ready for review and distribution
- Final Baseline Data Collection Survey completed and ready for dissemination to AHA member hospitals.
- Received the Vice Presidential Hammer Award for excellence in government innovation in March 1999.

NEXT STEPS

The H2E Secretariat and Workgroups are working to:

- Distribute and produce the H2E Manual and make it nationally available to the healthcare industry;
- Develop list of additional substances to be addressed by the partnership;

- Develop a clearinghouse of best practices and technical assistance providers;
- Create national training programs for hospitals based on the H2E Manual and other products developed by the project;
- Launch national awards programs, and;
- Establishment of the H2E Environmental Roundtable . The purpose of the AHA/EPA Executive Roundtable is to act as a catalyst in the implementation, within hospitals, of policies and practices which will advance mercury and overall waste reduction in hospitals. Membership in the Executive Roundtable will consist of CEOs from major US hospitals and other health related industries.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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